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ABSTRACT

A workshop for language teachers focusing on cooperative learning techniques is described. First, an example of the effectiveness of cooperative learning is demonstrated using a simple classroom game requiring interaction to solve a problem. The activity provides an opportunity for learners to practice questioning techniques in an authentic situation, builds a supportive and non-competitive learning environment, requires participants to use cognitive skills, and can be modified to achieve various objectives or teach a variety of topics. Considerations in making classroom cooperative learning activities effective are then outlined, including formation of roles and rules for cooperative groups, and shifting the teacher's role from instructor to facilitator. Forms are offered for individuals to assess their own contributions to the group effort, and for group members to rate each others' participation. It is concluded, based on the response of workshop participants, that the method fosters not only active learning but also a strong desire for cooperation with others. Contains 12 references. (MSE)

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Introduction

One of the major goals of teacher education programs is to equip prospective teachers with a variety of teaching techniques. Recent research demonstrated the effectiveness of cooperative learning techniques in classrooms. In second language classrooms, cooperative learning can promote oral language development, interaction between learners, and a positive learning environment.

The focuses of this workshop were (1) to demonstrate the effectiveness of cooperative learning through engaging prospective second language teachers in a specific cooperative learning activity, (2) to discuss how cooperative learning could be implemented in second language classrooms, and (3) to reflect on the cooperative learning process. Assessment based on an informal survey of a group of American teachers in a teacher credential program was also discussed.

Effectiveness of cooperative learning: An example

The workshop started with an activity called "Who Am I?" (Sloan, 1993). The intent of this activity is to demonstrate the effectiveness of cooperative learning in a second language classroom. A picture card with an animal name is tagged on the participant's back. The objective of each participant is to gather clues from peers in order to find out which animal was on his/her back. Participants may ask questions such as "Where do I live?" "What do I eat?" and "What color am I?" However, they may not ask, "Am I a _____ ?" The rules for this activity are that one can ask only one question of

each peer and answer one question from each peer. When a participant has gathered enough clues to guess the animal, he/she may ask, "Am I a _____?"

This activity provides an opportunity for second language learners to practice questioning techniques in an authentic situation. Rather than just practicing pattern drills in the classroom, an artificial situation, second language learners can formulate questions that are meaningful for them in accomplishing the objectives of an assigned task. Another advantage of this activity is that it allows learners of different language levels to participate (Bejarano, 1987; Johnson, Johnson, & Johnson, 1991; Lightbown & Spada, 1993; MaGroarty, 1989). This activity does not require participants to have a complete mastery of questioning techniques. Through this activity, learners negotiate meaning with each other. The more proficient learners model the questioning techniques to the less proficient learners in the class. This allows learners ample opportunity for practicing oral language skills. In fact, learners develop ownership of their learning process through constructing their own questions to solve the problem.

Another positive aspect of the "Who am I?" activity is building a supportive learning environment, which lowers the affective filter and allows language acquisition to take place. The focus is to engage participants in negotiating meaning and interacting with one another on a one-on-one basis in an informal atmosphere. This alleviates participants' anxiety about being judged on their grammatical competency (Krashen & Terrell, 1982). This activity also builds a positive image of the learners. Learners of high, intermediate, or low proficiency are all capable of accomplishing the task. The non-competitive nature of this activity encourage participants to support one another to achieve the common goal (Johnson et al., 1991; Kagan, 1986, 1989). It works especially well in classrooms that

include learners from diverse language and cultural backgrounds. The affective aspect is a crucial element in facilitating second language learning (Krashen & Terrell, 1982)

In addition to the oral language development and the affective aspect, the "Who Am I?" activity requires participants to use their cognitive skills. To determine who they are, participants have to activate their existing knowledge about the subject of the task. Then, they formulate general questions and proceed to specific ones to seek more precise information. During the questions process, they utilize their cognitive skills in categorizing and discriminating facts.

This activity can be modified and built into teaching to achieve various objectives. Examples of lesson topics are body parts, famous historical figures, geographic figures, sports, types of food, occupations, classroom objects, story events, etc. At the workshop, the "Who Am I?" activity demonstrated many of the benefits of cooperative learning, the following summarizes these benefits in second language classrooms (Johnson et al., 1991; Kagan, 1989; McGroarty, 1989; Prescott, 1991; Sharan, 1990; Sharon & Shachar, 1988).

* Engaging learners in natural settings
* Promoting active learning through authentic activities
* Promoting higher academic achievement
* Exposing learners to a variety of genres and language input
* Building a sense of ownership in learning
* Fostering positive self-esteem
* Developing support and respect for others
* Improving intergroup relations

* Developing social skills
* Facilitating oral language development through negotiation of meaning
* Integrating multi-level classes
* Responding to a variety of learning styles

Implementation of cooperative learning I: Forming cooperative groups

Cooperative learning often, of course, involves tasks for more logistically challenging than the "Who Am I?" activity. For this reason, successful implementation of cooperative learning in the classroom requires teachers' careful planning. This includes clearly communicating roles and expectations for group members in cooperative groups, and being specific in explaining and giving an appropriate time frame for groups to accomplish the task.

When forming cooperative groups, all members should be aware that they need to share in and contribute to accomplishing the group task. Individual success reflects on the group's success, and cooperation is the key to group success (Sharon, 1990). Establishing a set of rules and clarifying the different roles in the group ensures that all the group members will work cooperatively. The title of the roles, the prescribed responsibilities, and the rules can be modified to suit the needs of each classroom. Table 1 and Table 2 illustrate examples of roles and rules in cooperative groups (Kagan, 1992; Prescott, 1991).

Checker	• Keeps track of time allotted for completing task • Keeps everyone on task
Monitor	• Collects, returns, and disseminates materials • Makes sure everyone is participating
Recorder	• Takes notes during discussions • Makes sure everyone understands the task
Reporter	• Reports group's ideas to class • Contacts teacher if necessary

Table 1: Example of roles and responsibilities for cooperative learning groups

Respectful	No put-downs
Listening	To what other teammates say
Participating	Putting effort into doing the work
Helping	Anyone who needs help
Encouraging	Giving positive feedback

Table 2: Example of rules for cooperative learning groups

Implementation of cooperative learning II: Teacher's role

Incorporating cooperative learning would shift the role of teachers and the dynamics in classrooms. Unlike the traditional classroom, which is characterized by the teacher giving direct instructions, and students being loaded with paper and pencil practices, in the cooperative learning classroom, teachers are facilitators (Brooks & Brooks, 1993; Sharon, 1990). They actively interact with students in the learning process. Meanwhile, students are expected to take an active role in generating their questions, which lead to subsequent lessons. This forms the basis for a constructivist classroom, as students primarily work in cooperative groups in which second language learners construct meaning and expand their language capacity based upon what they already know. What this means for the teacher's role, more specifically, is that in this approach, curriculum planning focuses on student centered learning and authentic activities (Nunan, 1988), and that lesson content is present from whole to part with emphasis on big concepts.

Assessing individual cooperation

Assessment is an important aspect of cooperative learning. It addresses one of the most common question raised about it, namely, "How can teachers ensure that each member in the group did an equal share of the work?" The "Individual Self-Evaluation Form" and "Individual Cooperation Grades by Group Members" in Table 3 and Table 4 below, have been used in a language learning course in a teacher training program in the United States in evaluating individual's performance in cooperative groups. The "Individual Self-Evaluation Form" is designed for each individual group member to

evaluate his/her participation in cooperative group work, and the "Individual Cooperation Grades by Group Members" is designed for each group member to use to evaluate other members of the group (Prescott, 1991). These two instruments serve as an avenue for individuals to reflect on their own and their group members' performance. The reflections guide each group member working together cooperatively. On the evaluation of the individual cooperation grades, one student who went through the cooperative group experience commented (May, 1995):

> I felt very fortunate to be a part of such a cooperative, enthusiastic and supportive group. I have worked in other cooperative groups where at least one person tried to get by doing very little; that never happened here. We learned a lot from each other. I especially enjoyed the simulation lessons and felt that people's personalities shined and their talents really showed through.

Prospective teachers in the training program also said that peer evaluation fostered a stronger desire for cooperative effort with other group members. Many of the prospective teachers said that they would use similar assessment techniques in their own classrooms.

Prospective teachers' reflections on the cooperative learning process

Prospective teachers' reflections play a significant role in influencing their future perspectives in teaching. Having the opportunity to play the role of a member of a group gives them have a clear sense of the problems that group members encounter and how they would be resolved. These experiences prepare prospective teachers to play a more effective role in implementing cooperative learning in their classrooms. The result from the informal survey demonstrated that well structured cooperative learning groups have a

positive impact on prospective teachers' learning. In turn, their learning experiences will have a positive impact on the learning of their future students.

Please circle the numbers below which best represent your participation in the group work		
Use this scale		Strongly Disagree . . Strongly Agree
1.	I shared in my group's task.	1 2 3 4 5
2.	I encouraged others in my group.	1 2 3 4 5
3.	I checked to make sure others understood the work.	1 2 3 4 5
4.	I was willing to give and receive help.	1 2 3 4 5
5.	I accepted responsibilities for completing work properly.	1 2 3 4 5
Comments/Suggestions _____ _____ _____ _____ Signature _____ Date		

Table 3: Individual Self-Evaluation Form

Instructor: _____ Course: _____

Student's Name: _____

Member Being Graded: (fill in member's name next to letter)

A. _____ B. _____ C. _____

D. _____ E. _____ F. _____

A	B	C	D	E	F	(2 pts, 1.5 pts, 1 pt, or 0)
						Did fair share of work
						Participated equally in: planning, generating ideas, gathering/developing materials
						Available for consultation in person or by phone
						Worked constructively: no "put-downs" of ideas or individuals; did not dominate or intimidate; validated ideas of others; able to negotiate constructively
						Made effort to share; helped others as needed
						Total points (10 maximum)

Table 4: Individual Cooperation Grades by Group Members

Conclusion

Cooperative learning is an effective technique for second language teaching. It should be integrated throughout the teacher training process. It is important for prospective second language teachers to see cooperative learning being modeled and practiced. They should also have the opportunity to reflect on their learning process. The reflection enables them to further recognize the powerful impact of cooperative learning in both the learning and teaching process, which can ensure their effective application of the cooperative learning techniques in second language teaching.

Note

1. The "Individual Cooperation Grades by Group Members" in Table 1 is adopted from Professor Diana Wolff at California State University, Dominguez Hills.

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